

# The Christian News-Letter

No. 210

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

June 14th, 1944

**D**EAR MEMBER,  
"To drive up as I did to-day," a press correspondent in Italy wrote recently, "overland from Naples to what was four days ago the 'beach-head' is a revelation. Through all this area the war already seemed weeks away. Demolished bridges have been repaired, craters filled up, and a refugee population streaming back to their homes carrying bundles of household gear and driving carts full of furniture. As I drove through the old beach-head defences it was impossible to believe that these had been the battle line only a few days ago, and that what had been a closely besieged fortress was now almost out of sight and sound of the fighting."

These words must have evoked in many who read or listened to them a spontaneous prayer that what is here described might be a symbol and prophecy of the recovery of the world from its spiritual sickness and disintegration. This recovery will be a slower, more difficult process than the repair of the ravages of war. But no Christian can doubt that, whatever the appearances to the contrary, the power of life will in the end defeat the forces of death.

That life is persistently at work in our midst, but its manifestations are less easy to record than the evidences of decay or devastation. Death is catastrophic, while life wins its way by inches and scarcely perceptible advances. There often appears to be no particular reason why one instance should be singled out from others of a similar kind. We shall note in this News-Letter two or three examples that have come to our attention and, they are representative of many like them, that makes them more, not less, significant.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IN COVENTRY

Coventry more than any other town has become the symbol of the destructiveness of war. It is not surprising that the plans for the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral have attracted widespread attention and that there has been much comment on the novel features which they contain.

Coventry is a new diocese, created in 1918, and its Cathedral was the old and magnificent parish church. Anything less like a cathedral city on the "Barchester" model would be difficult to find. Coventry has made itself by, and prides itself upon, its flair for seeing what is the coming thing—bicycle, car or aero-engine. However true it is that the famous three spires of its three closely built churches are the symbol of his home town to every Coventrian, the civic pride of Coventry grew up not around its cathedral but around its industries.

What is the relevance of a cathedral to a busy modern industrial town? That is the question which the planners of the new cathedral

have asked themselves. They have refused to build a facsimile of an ancient cathedral, lovely in itself but irrelevant to the busy life around it. Instead, the new cathedral is to be an attempt to give expression to the religious aspect of the life of the place. It is not to be a parish church, but the centre of a new and thriving diocese. Coventry has a vigorous Free Church life and a record of friendly co-operation between the Churches which few towns could rival, and this is to be expressed in the chapel of unity which will be part of the cathedral. An integral part of the scheme will be the community house or service centre, which again is to enable church organizations to serve the community more effectively by providing a central meeting place and a skilled staff.

The whole conception is an adventure. It would have been so easy to put the stones back more or less as they were, recall the choirs, the vestments, the awe and ceremony of a cathedral. To make a cathedral a true expression of life already in existence and to give it meaning for the many who only when the cathedral was a blazing inferno felt any sense of possession about it, is a difficult task, and many of us who have no cathedrals to rebuild need equally to dwell upon the problems of the Church in the modern world which this rebuilding throws into relief.

## FULL EMPLOYMENT IN THE MEDWAY TOWNS

The same sense of place and driving power of local loyalty which are an important element in the plans for Coventry found expression last month in a meeting in the Rochester Guildhall, at which steps were taken to set up a Full Employment Council for the Medway Towns District. It is a cheering and hopeful thing that a body of private citizens in a particular area should refuse to wait for the Government to do something, and decide to deal with the problem of unemployment in their own locality. The Council included representatives of the trades unions, the three local authorities, the banks, the large local employing establishments, the Medway Chamber of Commerce, the building trade and the Commander-in-Chief of the Nore. The inspiration of Christian aims was freely acknowledged. The chairman of the meeting urged that the community should accept to the full its Christian responsibilities for the 150,000 human beings of the Medway Towns, and maintained that there were times in history when men like the group assembled had to rise above themselves and meet the challenges of to-day, when hunger challenges plenty and love challenges greed.

## LEADERSHIP IN SERVICE

I have wanted for a long time to call attention to a small book, published last year, by Dr. F. C. Happold, the headmaster of Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury. It is called *Towards a New Aristocracy*.<sup>1</sup> While it starts from a penetrating diagnosis of the present situation, it is not in the main a discussion of theory, but a vivid account of an attempt to work things out in a particular school. It leaves a powerful impression of a new England being created, and it adds to the exhilarating effect to know that there are other schools where the same kind of work is being done.

<sup>1</sup> Faber and Faber. 5s.



When Dr. Happold was appointed headmaster, about fifteen years ago, he set himself to think out the kind of education which he wanted to give, and put to himself the following searching questions : " Are the boys and girls coming out of the schools of England adequately trained to meet the demands which they must meet as a condition of the survival of the democratic way of life in a changing age ? Do they know enough and is their knowledge of the right sort ? Have they that capacity for clear, fearless thinking, that adaptability which will enable them to adjust themselves to a new environment, that selflessness and social awareness which will compel them to put the common good before their own personal interests ? "

It was plain to Dr. Happold that society cannot get along without leadership. " No democracy can exist unless it has within itself an aristocracy sufficiently powerful and informed to direct general opinion. " The foundation of an education for leadership must be laid in physical fitness. Next to this a full outlet must be provided for the emotional and creative urges of boys and girls ; arts and crafts, music and drama must form an essential part of any balanced education. This must not be limited, however, to training the capacity of appreciation. Man finds his satisfaction in acquiring skill, and skill can be gained only by doing things. Most important of all, perhaps, was the perception that the individual obtains the highest satisfaction from his skill when it finds its exercise and use in communal activity and in the service of the common good. The dominant conception is that of a self-educating school community in which education comes " not primarily through words but through situations, not primarily through instruction but through a pattern of living, not primarily through courses of study but through an intangible, spiritual atmosphere created by the community. " Compressed into a paragraph, these aims may seem commonplaces ; one has to go to Dr. Happold's pages to see what they mean in the growth of a vivid, creative, communal life.

The spirit of the school found its most characteristic expression in the formation of Companies of Service. In one sense the whole school must be a company of service ; the responsibilities and obligations were binding on everyone. But the idea had to be given a definite outward expression and mirrored in appropriate outward symbols. Consequently, while all members of the school were potential members of the Company of Service, actual membership was given only when a boy had proved himself through some form of service. Membership implied an obligation to do everything possible to preserve and increase the spirit of service and responsibility in the school, and pointed forward also to the greater tasks in the larger world which is in urgent need of enlightened leadership and unselfish service. The vital matter, however, was not the moral appeal, but the training of capacity. The whole effort was based on the important principle that a boy who has been *trained* in some specific technique is much more likely to desire to use the talent he possesses in the service of others than if he had merely been told that it was his duty to serve his fellow-men.

All this was not brought about by a stroke, but only through much patience and perseverance. " One of the things I have learned as a headmaster is that the working out of ideals is to a great extent a matter

of skilful organization and constant plodding work. It is easy to sit in an armchair and dream dreams ; it is almost as easy to give a lecture on ideals. But to make these dreams come true, to translate these ideals into reality, involves weary hours seated at a desk, working at a time-table through which fifteen masters can be made to do the work of twenty and a dozen classrooms may be made to do the work of sixteen. It involves, too, constant watchfulness, perpetual adaptability to circumstance, never ceasing attention to detail."

The deeper implications of what the school was attempting to do were never absent from Dr. Happold's mind. "At times in the course of writing this book I have been oppressed by a feeling that I am merely skimming the surface of things, that the crisis which has come upon us is so catastrophic, so pregnant with judgment, that every effort of human thought to cope with it is doomed to failure, that a world which is spiritually bankrupt can only be redeemed by a fresh resurgence of the Spirit. That resurgence cannot be a mass movement ; it can only come through those who, having passed through the experience of death to the world and rebirth into the fulness of the life of Christ, are able to be the channels of a new spiritual insight and a new spiritual energy. This experience of spiritual death and rebirth lies at the root of Christianity ; on it everything else depends."

## OXFORD HOUSE AND THE FUTURE

I have before me the annual report of the Oxford House in Bethnal Green. For sixty years the Settlement has ministered unremittingly to the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of East London. The striking thing about the report is the courage and broad vision with which it faces a future in which large changes in the work of residential settlements are inevitable. Much that they have done in the past will be undertaken in days to come more comprehensively and with larger resources by public authorities. If the spirit of the following passage in the report becomes infectious, whatever fate awaits our country will not find us an unready people :

"The institutions for which we are responsible will undergo changes and we must not regret it. We must be the servants of the Creative Spirit and not strive to be the masters. The Oxford House should regard itself, not as permanent owner of the responsibility for its ventures, but rather as temporary trustee until such time as added experience or greater leisure have produced others with a better claim to ownership. We are yet far from the establishment of a just social order ; we are still farther from an order that might in any sense be called 'Christian.' We must fill in gaps where we can, as we have done in the past, but *not become fixed in the gaps* ; we must be free to advance by the countless means that are to hand, the Christian way to which the Oxford House is ultimately committed."

Our members have up to the present sent us £212 12s., in sums ranging from 5s. to £25, for the extension of the work of the Christian Frontier.

Yours sincerely,

D. H. Deane



## THE CHURCH AND THE ORDINARY MAN

What follows is simply a single piece of experience of relations between the Church and the ordinary man. That experience, moreover, was largely gained in a ship of the Royal Navy, manned by an ever diminishing number of professional sailors and a correspondingly increasing number of men who had joined for the war. There quite obviously existed a sense of community different in a way from that which is found either in a town or indeed in the other two Services. "Is she a happy ship?" As the sailor thinks of his life at sea, that is the question he asks above all. The fact that this is the case shows how instinctively he thinks in terms of community.

It is natural that this should happen. From the moment he goes aboard, his life is confined within the walls of his ship. He cannot escape, so it stands to reason that his happiness will turn inevitably on her happiness. Once they join a ship, men who might never bother their heads about their neighbours ashore, are bound in sheer self-defence to get on with their shipmates. For this reason alone, if for no other, there has grown up in the Navy a tradition of duty owed to the community. A great deal of the discipline is framed to make it possible for men to live together who may have no natural inclination to get on with each other. From their earliest years they are trained to have a concern for their shipmates, so that a man regards it as part of his job to look out for his fellows, to give of his leisure to resolve their difficulties, and to back anything that is aimed to make life better for those on board. Nor is this background limited to those who have grown up in the Service. As the men who had joined for the war were woven into its life, it was possible to watch this tradition working its way into their minds. They could not ignore the need of community, or life was intolerable.

Against such a background what follows is written. Its relevance, therefore, in a wider context may be weakened by this very difference in background; but men are men wherever they are, and perhaps one's own experience may to some extent tally with that of others, whose life during these years of war has been lived on dry land.

### GROUPINGS

To put men in groups is a rash undertaking. In real life the boundary marks are seldom clear, and some men do not fit into any one category. Yet some grouping must be tried in an account of this kind, however rough and ready the divisions may be.

### *Men who were convinced*

First then were those who joined this community as convinced and practising Christian men. Largely because of what they had learned at home and of their own *attrait*, there had never been a significant gap in their worshipping life. These men had a strong sense of obligation to the Christian Church and, though there was a good deal to be done in relating their deep convictions to their new setting, the fact that their foundations were as sure as they were, made that transition mainly a matter of time. That was true even where there was a certain inflexibility of mind and temper, due to the limits of their previous experience, though then the transition merely took longer and needed more patient guiding. In general these men were the salt of the earth, and round them you aimed to build your Christian community.

### *Men who became convinced*

Next came the people who were brought into the centre from the fringes. With them it sometimes happened that war and all that it meant in interrupting their old way of living, and supremely their life in the home, had deepened their seriousness and sharpened their sense of needing something—a need made even more acute by their experience of battle. Sometimes it was the outrage upon their fastidiousness which drove them in search of anything civilized, for the complete absence of privacy and all that that involves is one of the hardest things men on the lower deck have to face. Sometimes it was intense personal trouble that sent them hot foot to anyone who had time for them and would understand. Sometimes it was the inspiring encouragement of their girls and their women folk, who made them feel that religion was an anchor, without which they could not expect to keep steady. But always, finally, what turned the scale was an experience of something real both in worship and in community. Usually they had a hazy idea of what the Christian faith was, and inevitably there was confusion in their minds about how to relate religion to living, and to the kind of questions their messmates were asking and the charges they made about the Church and its job. But they were teachable. There lay the chance. For them because of their new-found religion, life had unquestionably become richer. They were more serene. They were finding help for their living. There were friends at the back of them. Besides they were learning that this experience could not stop with themselves, and in widening the circle among friends outside, they found they had a part and a job that brought satisfaction.

Nevertheless, though they had come over the step, they were still only new entries. That fact is vital. When they become separated from the particular Christian community in which they have found themselves, and adrift from its burning enthusiasm, and



discover instead a church where there is great disparity in age, background and experience, where faith and worship seem remote from living, where in fact the difference between their tempo and that of the church is clearly marked, there is danger that they will pack up and say, "We are sorry, but this is not for us." Moreover, there is such a variety of forms of worship these days that the man who returns may well be bewildered by the sheer unfamiliarity of what he finds. The very fact that they are beginners makes it unlikely that they will have the stamina under such conditions to keep going on their own, unless the church is sensitive to their temper and will take trouble to build them wisely into its body. It will not be enough to be mildly welcoming, to be content with a handshake. If they are to continue to feel themselves members of the Family, they will at the very least expect from the people of the Church at home that degree of instinctive and continuing friendliness which is normally shown by one member of a club, school or ship who meets another in fresh and unfamiliar surroundings.

### *Men on the fringes*

Behind them stood another group of great significance. Dimly, and largely because of the traditions in which they grew up, they thought of the Church as standing in a way for decent things. They thought, for instance, that the Church was concerned that marriage relationships should be enduring, that children should be brought up to have certain standards of integrity, that men and women should deal honourably with each other, and that what was fine and selfless in a man's life should be strengthened. To some degree they thought of the Church as reliable, as representing some security of standard to which they could refer. The very fact that they would tend to apologize to the parson for any particular falling short of that standard, showed how far this was true. Accordingly, in so far as they felt that such standards mattered, they were to some extent prepared not to rule the Church out. But it was still remote. The great classic convictions about God and Jesus meant next to nothing, and they were comparatively happy to get along without them, though they often managed to live up to an astonishingly high standard, at any rate in the matter of public service. If these admirable people are to be brought within the community, they need first to be convinced by the reality of a man's believing, by its being rendered intelligible to them in teaching and worship, and by being made to see that in point of fact you get an infinitely better answer if you substitute sensitiveness to a spirit for obedience to a code.

### *Men further off*

But these formed only a minority at most. There remained the great majority who rubbed along somehow. About them it is

specially hard to generalize. They were held by many to be unthinking—all of them. Perhaps that was true of a great number. They worked, ate and slept, and washed their clothes (unless they were lucky enough to get someone else to do them); they went to the movies and whatever game of chance was allowed; and always they wrote home. The Church in most cases just never came their way, until maybe for the first time, and then often against a background of discipline, they met it in the Service, and hardly surprisingly they were prepared without question to accept all the debunking answers which the anti-religionists put up, or at any rate to make no strong protest against them.

Nevertheless, some of them did think. Among the more skilled, there invariably seemed real interest when talk turned to the future shape of things and when anyone showed he cared deeply about people, cared further that they should have a real chance, and knew evidently what he was talking about. Usually men such as these were apt to think and say they were powerless themselves to do anything about it, though they were quick to agree with anyone who spoke up passionately about the unreality of our British democracy and the idleness and carelessness of the British voter, and they accepted the fairness of this charge as it was turned against themselves. This was not the mood of cynicism. Some were certainly ready to say that there would be no real improvement at the end of it all, but many more were as ready to respond to the man who was determined that the common struggle should not have been in vain. What exercised their minds was how it should be done, and over and over again discussion, both secular and religious, would lead to the paramount need of the right education.

In their dealings they were grandly tolerant of each other, good to each other, quickly ready to appreciate the quality of anyone who gave unstintingly. This tolerance indeed was a virtue characterizing all the ship's life, and where it governed the attitude of members of one denomination to another, as it seemed invariably to do, it sprang rather from this virtue than from mere casual indifference. As time went on my opinion hardened that one of the big reasons why the gap has widened between the Christian community and the ordinary man is that he just is not convinced that the Church really cares. What comes to mind is not merely the indelible mark made on men's minds by the comparative silence of Church people during the unemployment years, it is rather the intensely disturbing memory of astonishment openly expressed whenever one acted on the principle that nothing was too much trouble where the other man was concerned.

This leads on to the reflection that in the daily run of things it is possible, almost easy, to rub along somehow. Certainly the feeling of sorrow, when people held dear are lost by death, makes a



striking exception ; but bereavement apart, it would seem to have become unusual for the ordinary unthinking person to experience anything deeply. That means that reverence and awe are unknown to the many, and with them accordingly religion too. Here the man whose life and work bring him close to the great elemental forces of nature has a clear advantage over the man who earns his bread in a town. The seaman finds he has to pit his skill and wits against wind and wave, and with the countryman has to allow for something wholly other which in the last resort he cannot control. The man who gets his livelihood in a town may know insecurity with all that is involved, but his insecurity he attributes not to any supernatural power but to an order of things which he feels should and could be altered. The merchant captain who, under a South Atlantic sky ablaze with stars, said that it was difficult for a seaman not to be a God-fearing man, voiced a feeling likely to be very much rarer in the man of the town. During the war years that set of facts would seem to have been disturbed among civilians by the experience of blitz, among some of the serving men by battle, and among almost all by separation. Battle, for instance, influenced most deeply the attitude of the groups of men who have been described in this paper. You could not trifle where death came as close as that. Nor did they. When there were losses and the leading was good, they rose to the greatest heights of steadiness and selflessness, and clearly at that point religion had real priority, and few, one hazards, would have denied its relevance. Nor did that seem to happen because they were frightened (though few men would deny feeling a little frightened when death was next door). Rather it was a sudden sense of littleness, heightening at once their need of God and of each other. So it followed naturally that they forgot themselves and brought community to its finest level.

Many of them indeed had got much farther along the road of Christian living than ever they dreamed, for being good to each other is about as Christian a quality as you can have. Some were prepared to experience worship from time to time, for the opportunity existed in a way it might never do outside, and that in our particular community was a fact which counted, for attendance at church was no compulsory business. If the worship was sensed to be alive and was reasonably familiar, and if above all they could be made to feel they were doing something for their homes, they were prepared occasionally to have a go. Indeed this criterion of their homes, and whether for instance they would help them by joining in worship, was more significant and revealing as the months wore on.

Experience elsewhere has seemed to suggest that men's willingness to worship has been most widely influenced by the appeal of national days of prayer—that they have an appeal, no one in his

sense would dispute—yet this experience was in my memory overshadowed by the appeal of church on Christmas Day. Men came then to worship because Christmas was the feast of the home, and because they felt nearer to their families in church than they did anywhere else. It followed naturally that more men made their communion at Christmas time than at any other festival of the Christian year. Here seems a pointer to guide future rebuilding.

Granted all this, these men, with the exception of the first group, had little sense of obligation to any Christian body, a fact thrown into stronger relief by the Roman Catholics who shared their life and of whom almost all, even if they were but nominal members of their church, seemed strongly to have this sense of obligation. It needed, therefore, a messmate probably to take the initiative and bring them along, and they were easily deflected if someone suggested loudly that they were appearing better than they were or that they were using the Church to their own advantage. That kind of deflection came the more readily because of the confusion of values. To them religion had a way of seeming far more concerned with not swearing than with the quality of living together.

### *Men still further off*

There remained those who on no account whatever would have anything to do with Church or with worship. How many they were it would be rash to say. An instinctive judgment was that the reasons were more negative than positive, and such scoffing as there was appeared to be more often on the ground that religion was soft than that it was false. However, even such men as these did not seem to regard themselves as debarred from seeking help if they were in any sort of a jam, and more especially when it related to their homes and married life. Religion did seem to count there, for they felt small and helpless, and the Church was presented with its greatest chance. Of course it is true that such a chance came mainly the way of the Chaplain, if he was doing his job. And if he showed he could go down to the depths with a man and help him up on the other side, he banished the remoteness and built a relationship that always endured. The man whose trouble he had shared moreover, felt that a friend like this might be right after all in the religion he preached, and was far more likely to be drawn into worship by such proof that the Church really cared than by the cleverest schemes that might be devised to get him to attend services. But the chance came the way of the layman as well. He knew very soon, unless he was blind, if the man alongside looked worried at all; and if he had been taught in church that he had real responsibility for the men all around him and that this was part of his calling as a Christian, he would try either to help in any way that he could or act as the link between the man and the parson. That leads on to



the judgment that in the years following the war, when the need for marital reconciliation may rise alarmingly, the Church (parson and people) may find, if it has the requisite skill, that here is one of the most significant of its points of entrance. To concentrate on houses and homes, with all that they mean, may well be the Church's most pressing job in the years that follow the coming of peace.

## MEN AND WORSHIP

But personal trouble only created a sense of littleness. Before it could be turned into awe, worship was needed. It seems well, therefore, to write in more detail of the attitude of some of these groups to worship. About worship they would always say that it must be real and genuine if it was to mean anything to them. That chiefly is why they were suspicious of repetition, though the suspicion vanished if the words meant something to their understanding and were related to their condition. Their very hankering after familiar hymns showed that it was not the fact of repetition that put them off. Some, even many, chaplains have thought it wise to dispense largely with set forms; but the wisdom of this lies open to question as one reflects that the unchanging form of the Communion service does, when it is used, seem to meet the deepest need of so many.

Of course forms as such do not hold the answer. When they are unrelated to the condition of the moment and, into the bargain, are used with no imagination at all, it is hardly surprising that they should not be very much help. Then they mean little and do nothing to stir a man's desire to worship. Indeed it can be strongly argued that the forms of matins and evensong as they stand will never satisfy any but the most highly trained of these men. Few of them as they came to the singing of the great majority of the psalms were thinking much further than how on earth they were to fit words to the music, and my own feeling grew stronger that if we were to go on using psalms in public worship, not only must they be chosen with the utmost care, but in normal worship they ought usually to be spoken. Lessons equally required most careful choosing, and as often as not they needed to be wisely introduced if they were not to be so much double dutch to the listener. It is no answer at all to speak of the value to men's mind of hearing splendid language read finely aloud if it has no meaning in their experience. As for the prayers, they felt too many of them, hurriedly repeated with a complete absence of silences, to be no help at all in learning the art of how to pray. "Hurry," as has been said, "is the death of prayer," and experience taught that to be true just as much in corporate worship as one knows it to be true in one's own private prayers. But all this is not to say that forms had no value. I am sure from my own experience that they are the indispensable basis of all our

worship together. These men made it clear that the words that had stood the test of time still rang true for them. The splendour of the classic expressions of worship still satisfied their deepest desires, and the strength of the collects and the great prayer-hymns common to all the Churches bound firmly together their own halting prayers. Granted that sometimes a word needed skilfully changing, granted always the need of teaching and explanation, as time went on they saw the point. The great forms took life and gave worship the richness that satisfied. They were sensitive to quality.

Worship needed the most thoughtful preparation. It was not always easy to decide on the theme of a service. Regular discussion parties—padre's hours—talking with this man and that provided the opportunity for clearing up misconceptions, and helped to reveal what specially puzzled, what was urgently wanted, and so pointed the way to the choice of a theme. Again, it was often hard to pick hymns for the day which at once made sense to their minds, were reasonably familiar, and took their place in the design of the service. The chaplain was wise who made his decision with a layman beside him. Invariably the preparation repaid all the trouble taken, and if it related to the previous week's worship, the fact that unlikely men continued to come showed how much it meant.

If I dared to generalize, I should say that where the Church was truly sharing the life of the community, and where it was prepared to do its work untiringly, few men in that community would deny its place in their life together. They would be inclined to admit the usefulness of any body whose business it was to be interested not in any single aspect of the life on board, but in their community as a whole and with its members as individual people. Because of that very concentration, they would, I believe, accept the proposition that it could make the greatest difference in keeping the community's life well balanced, ensuring, for instance, that minorities were not overlooked, and that individuals who could not readily fit into its life, or who ran their heads against it, got some help. I fancy too they had the feeling that the great moments of their life together would lose something if the Church were not there to put them in a grander and deeper setting. Even so, they would always, I think, be a little surprised if the Church could take and hold that place. And in that fact one sees the extent of the remoteness of the Church to-day from the ordinary man.

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Subscriptions—12s. 6d. (\$3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d. (to No. 178, 4d.); reduction for quantities.

Folders—New format, holding one year's supply, 3s. post free.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

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Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.